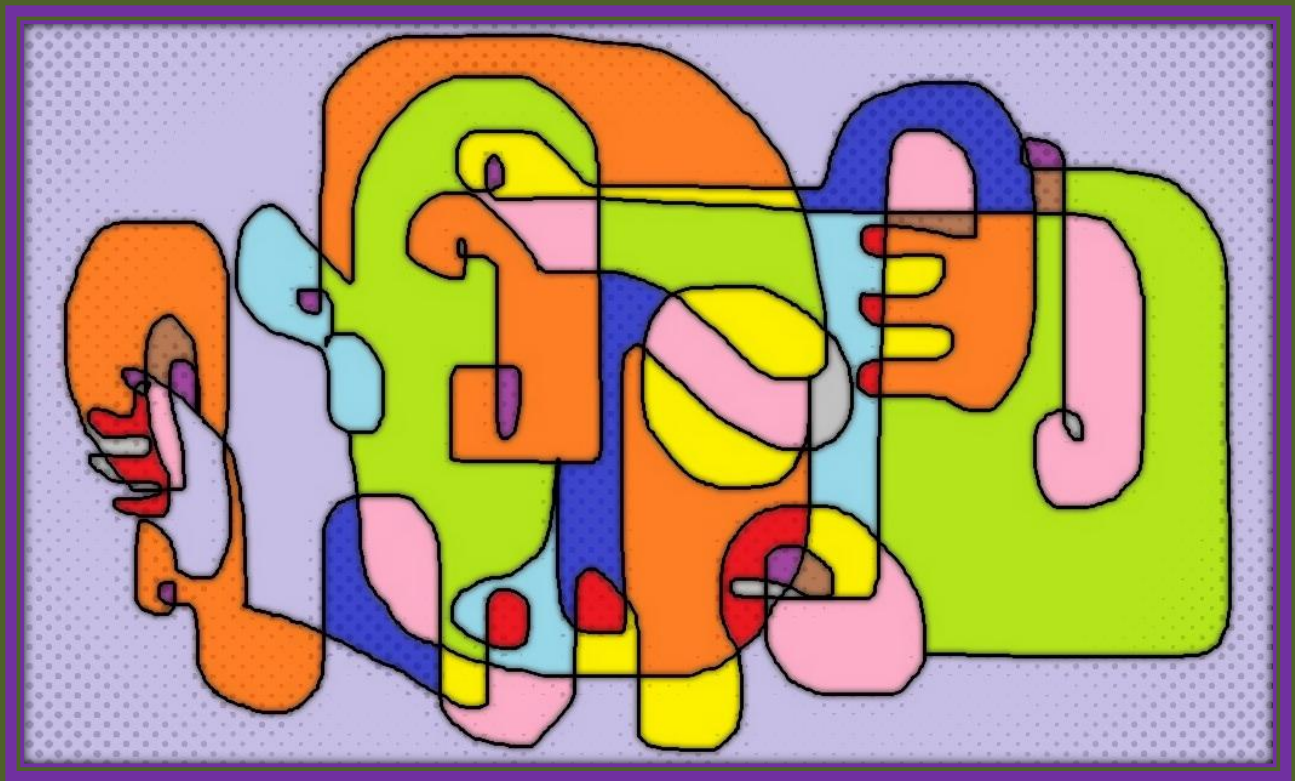


Paintings of Robots



Nathaniel S. Rounds

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Sun of Man

Noah always has the sun in his face
His features casting long shadows

But minus shadows

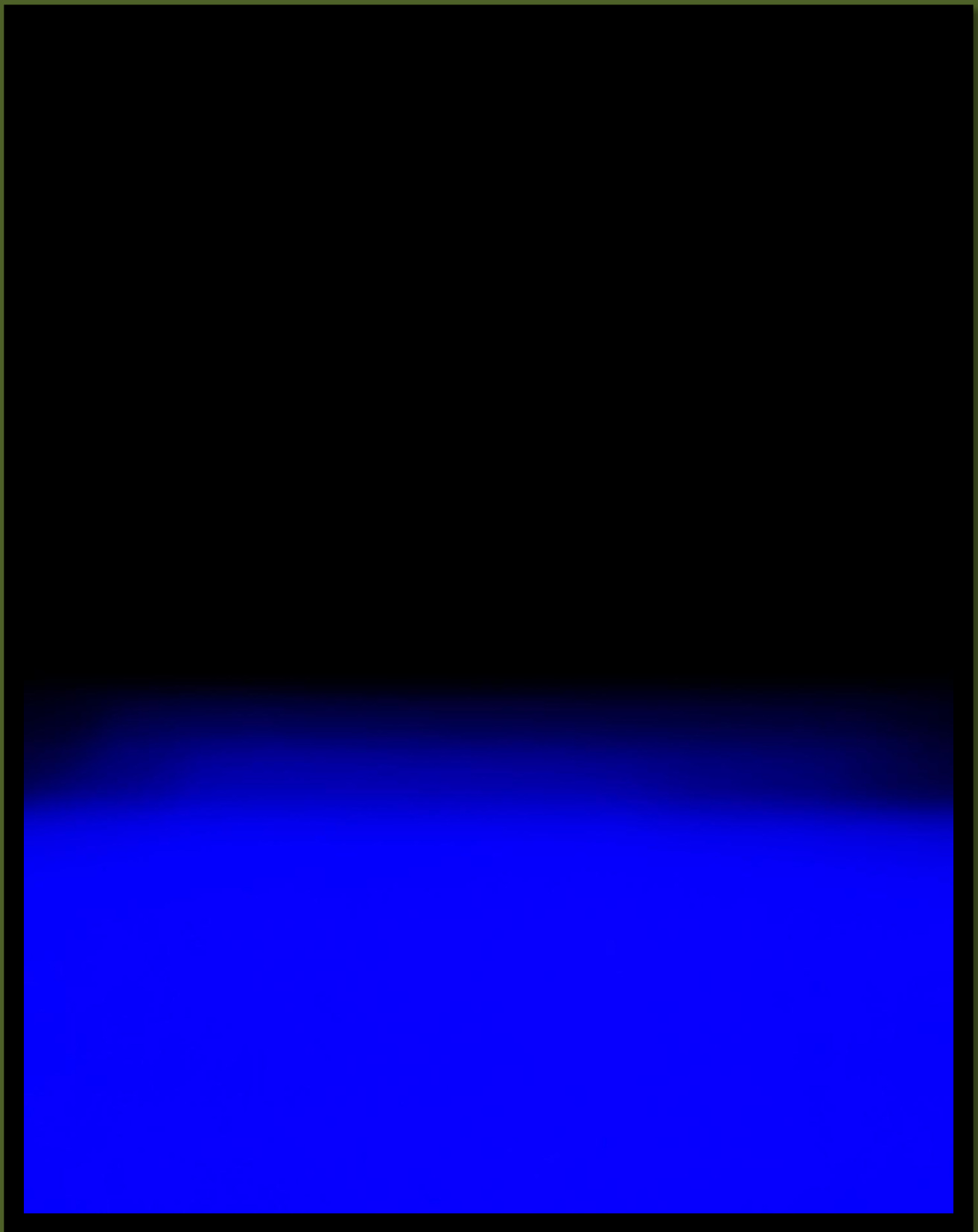
His eyes nose and lips
And deep-set wrinkles
Seem incomplete
And out of place

He reaches his destination

Meeting the sun's unyielding glare
He watches and hears out and warns
While staring down the light of day
And when the rainclouds gather and obscure

The sun and its illumination

Noah pushes his animals and helpmate and progeny
Into a lamp-lit box



Reject Spy by (S)corn

Let your short-term haircut be the talk of the town. You get two looks in one: Chocolate dribbling in Gaudi-esque cascades along the sides and back, topped with a flaming, comet goldfish. Our short-term haircut is a natural successor to Sir Astrotrain Sandstorm III, the tinfoil-clad skywriter with a penchant for pickles. Buy two advanced pro-formula short-term haircuts in the child-proof box, and we'll give you twelve hundred dollars against the mortgaged bereavement getaway of your choice. If this haircut fails to glitter and the loan-to-value is not gold, return immediately for a full refund. Only participants in the 48 contiguous states may apply, and are invited to do so liberally.

Calling a Tale a Leg

At a seafood buffet
Noach Fouling
Retired medical illustrator and amateur sleuth
Had a countenance marred
By barnacles and mollusks
Which he had treated with zinc cream
And in the dim light his face appeared
As a grim mask floating
Over his plastic tray as it scuttled along
On a track that skirted the buffet

Fouling also had a restless leg
He'd nicknamed Kyeser
Kyeser removed itself at the knee
When the opportunity presented itself
As it did now when Fouling seated himself
And once Fouling dove into some green bean casserole
And Garlic Jumbo Shrimp
Kyeser jumped out the door
And headed down the Miracle Mile
To find clues regarding mysteries both culinary and aquatic
Just a restless leg in a knee sock and casual shoe
Jumping and skipping to a sprightly rhythm
Until the telephone poles and shadows
Blurred into a piano keyboard of light and dark notes

Kyeser stopped by the waterfront
And watched a frogman in an old-time diving suit and helmet
Spread buttocks paste on a deep-diving research submersible
Which was mounted on a shiplift
He spread the buttocks paste with a butter knife

The frogman sang about calamari
Pan-seared and served on beaver tail cacti
Alongside a bowl of melted cream cheese dip
And how one must never confuse buttocks paste
With cream cheese dip
Although he had witnessed a glorious epiphany
Upon doing so
And now he could file his own tax return
And had neutered his own dog
With ordinary household items

But neither the small crowd of tourists
Or Kyeser could discern what he sang
As it was muffled by his formidable helmet
And untreatable lockjaw
And a persistent, undiagnosed melancholy
That declared itself when he jumped into unlocked cars
Left to idle
And drove away
Which he did presently
Although it was hard going
As his helmet and the '77 Gremlin's interior
Were not good companions

Kyeser returned to its master
And whispered his adventure
Into Fouling's barnacled ear
While Fouling finished off some lime Jell-o™

Thanks to Kyeser's remarkable powers
Of concentration, comprehension and retention
And his own powers of interpretation
Fouler was able to decode the frogman's croaks
And interpret them as a secret Native Alaskan recipe
For bowhead whale pizza
On a glucose-free crust
To be served to esteemed guests and friends
On the first day of summer

Fouler presented the recipe to the chef
A trusted friend of many years
And they and his leg, Kyeser
Would soon be arriving in Barrow
On a twin-engine, Piper Chieftain
To be greeted by their Inupiat guide
And led to a subsistence whale hunt



Tanimanga

My heart was refined in cooking pots
Sold in Antsirabe's market place
They are made of sky-blue clay
Which seldom yields to fire

I survived the March of Death
Nursed back to health on the Isle of Wight
Sometimes wrath breaks the surface
And washes over me
Like foaming waters
Over Neustadter bones

Wrath feels my heart's resistance
And dries up
The millwright cannot grind his grain
The sky to the west dims
Night's hourglass counts its time
With slowly sifting sand
And the tawny owl follows them
With eyes plunged in amethyst

Bally Midway Vignette

The games room at the dentist's office:
Situated in a finished basement
Painted salmon-pink
With a pinball machine and a Sega™ arcade game
A Little Tikes™ castle and slide set
A wall-mounted TV
And six waiting room chairs
It was cold, as basements are
And the fluorescent lights were dim

The five year-old boy had been given three quarters
For the pinball machine
By his mother, who was reading *Cosmopolitan* through
Huge sunglasses
While talking loudly on her cell phone

"Well, I don't mind my fifty K investment"
She was saying in a blasé tone
"I just want to see a *return* on the *condo*..."
The boy knew that her phone didn't work
Because it was a demo mock-up from his uncle's kiosk
In the mall

The pinball machine was called *8-Ball Champ*
And had seen better days
You could get three plays on one quarter
There was a stepping stool for kids
For which he was grateful
And while he hadn't played this particular game before
He quickly racked up 286,170 points on one play
Using the flipper buttons sparingly but expertly

The machine flashed the score across four, orange diode displays
Alternating with the figure 666,666 and making the fluorescent
Lights dim further

"I just think six weeks in Cancun
Doesn't *do* it for me, y'know?"
Said the mother
"Those cabana boys are all the same
And they don't know a thing."

He was used to her play-talking but didn't want it to interfere
With his game
So he had taken the precaution of taking a Vicodin™ from her purse
And sticking it in her Perrier™ lime-and-water
She was slurring her words now
And stopped speaking every now and then
Resuming after a moment where she had left off

A hygienist entered the room with a basket of
Dirty linen and disappeared into the laundry room
Then returned, crossing over the grey carpet
In her orange Crocks™

"I ...don't *like* Crocks,™" said the mother in a horse whisper
"Issssss like wearrrring... *trash* on your feet"

The five-year-old was still battling away on his first quarter
And the machine seemed a little fatigued
With various, numbered circles either flickering
Or failing to light at all
And now the Sega™ arcade game to the right
Had inexplicably started to groan
High, and then low, like an eight-bit robot
On a roller coaster
But he scarcely noticed as his hands sent the score board
To an unprecedented high

The pinball machine began to smoke

"Our mmmmmaid forgot our *toasssst* this morning," said the mother
"I'm a reasona... buh...tha' ... bag'ssss... ga go...."

The sprinkler system went off around the time the 8-Ball champ
Caught on fire due to an electrical short
At which point the five-year-old took refuge in the castle tower

The receptionist had come downstairs to ask the mother
About her method of payment toward the anesthesia
When she noticed the downpour from the ceiling, the smoke
From the doused arcade machine and the mother snoring
While sprawled over three chairs

"I'm sorry," came a voice from the castle tower

"I broke the record, and it made the rain."

The receptionist called for assistance and got a man from the
Waiting room to carry the mother up the stairwell
While she held onto the little boy's hand
"I think you'll find my video game an excellent challenge,"
She said cheerfully
"I need two more barns for my Facebook game
And I have a popsicle I'm too full to eat."

Nathaniel S. Rounds is equally at home among the schlep cognoscenti and the lummox intelligentsia. He writes from Dartmouth, Nova Scotia.

